

Newark Afro-Am.

NEGRO EDUCATION IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NEWARK, NEW  
JERSEY, DURING THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The purpose of this historical study was to examine the particular history of the genesis and development of segregated Negro education in the public schools of Newark during the nineteenth century. Specifically, this study purports: (1) to determine the nature and quality of educational opportunities available to black children in Newark by making certain comparisons between the officially designated Colored School and comparable district schools; (2) to examine the nature of Colored School facilities; and (3) to consider the process through which the institution was finally abandoned.

City directories, municipal records, church records and histories, and contemporary newspapers were of particular value to the research process.

This study revealed that Newark generally reflected prevailing white attitudes in the North insofar as the black man was concerned, with residents desiring a separation of the races in all sectors of society. Care was taken not to have city policies become offensive to the South, a leading market for Newark's industrial out-



put. Thus it was that a segregated school system developed within Newark's social milieu.

Blacks were never a large segment of the city's population during the period examined in this study, and the ratio of blacks to whites in the public schools seldom exceeded that of blacks in the community at large.

Schools for blacks residing in the municipality were functioning during the second decade of the nineteenth century through the sponsorship of religious institutions. These schools became a part of the public school system in 1828, when public funds were first appropriated in support of separate black education at the request of Newark's black leaders. Throughout the century, blacks continued to petition municipal authorities for increased educational advantages.

Curricular offerings in the Colored School differed but little from those in the white district schools. In examinations for graduation, black children, generally, achieved satisfactory grades; however, they did not succeed to the same extent as white children. This situation was attributed to poor attendance, overloaded classrooms, and student discouragement stemming from limited vocational and higher educational opportunities available upon graduation. Colored School facilities were located, initially, in rented rooms; then, as buildings became



available upon abandonment by whites, black pupils were moved through a succession of district-owned schoolhouses. Generally, these facilities were of poor quality, remotely located and, at times, unquestionably substandard. Despite comparatively low scheduled salaries and inferior facilities, per pupil costs in the separate school were among the highest in the city.

District schools were opened to black children on a regular basis in 1872, following a series of bitter debates. There are strong indications that the position of Roman Catholic members of the Board of Education was an important factor in bringing about integration and the opening of the local high school and normal school to blacks. When black children entered the district schools, there was no serious opposition from the white majority, nor was the local press antagonistic. The Colored School, however, continued to function as a viable institution, admitting black children on a voluntary basis until the end of the first decade of the twentieth century.

The conclusions of the study include the following: (1) the Colored School of Newark provided an important service to members of the black community during an era when they were barred from district schools; (2) the school provided a vehicle through which black teachers were able to demonstrate their competency as profession-



als; and (3) the continued existence of the Colored School delayed total integration far beyond the point at which it would have occurred had blacks been actively encouraged to enroll in the district schools.